



Child and Youth Sexual Exploitation in the San Diego Region: A Community Assessment for the ACTION Network

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Cynthia Burke, Ph.D.

Debbie Correia

Sylvia J. Sievers, Ph.D.

Sandy Keaton, M.A.



401 B Street
Suite 800
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 699-1900

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CHILD AND YOUTH SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN THE SAN DIEGO REGION: A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT FOR THE ACTION NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the ACTION Network (Against Child Trafficking and The Prostitution of Teens In Our Neighborhoods) received funding from The California Endowment to build their capacity, complete a community assessment to determine which areas are disproportionately impacted by human trafficking and child and youth sexual exploitation, and develop a five-year community action plan¹. The ACTION Network is a coordinating body that brings together a multidisciplinary group of governmental and nongovernmental organizations to address child trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in San Diego County. As part of this project, San Diego Youth and Community Services (SDYCS) contracted with the Criminal Justice Research Division of the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to conduct the community assessment to help inform and guide ACTION Network's strategic plan to address sexually exploited youth in the San Diego Region. Recognizing that child exploitation can involve many different forms, the focus of this study is on domestic trafficking and more specifically, the prostitution of children and youth in the San Diego Region. This research is just one component of a comprehensive plan to address practices and policies aimed at assisting sexually exploited children and youth. As an active member of both the Steering Committee and the general ACTION Network, SANDAG research staff worked within the collaborative framework to both design and execute the research plan.

This CJ Bulletin provides an overview of the background related to this community assessment, describes the methodologies utilized to address four primary goals, summarizes the results of this six-month effort, and presents

conclusions and recommendations based on the information that was compiled.

FINDING HIGHLIGHTS

- One in three surveyed youth reported being sexually exploited and another one in five had been approached in the past and asked to engage in acts of prostitution.
- Sexually exploited youth who reported primarily trading sex and sexual favors for basic necessities and alcohol/drugs were *less* likely to report using condoms than those who traded primarily for money.
- Sexually exploited youth were more likely than other vulnerable youth to have run away from home, been victimized in their home by others they knew, used different drugs, and dropped out of school.
- Around half of the sexually exploited youth expressed an interest in stopping their involvement in prostitution/survival sex activities.
- Many of those who provided input noted that gangs are now more involved in the prostitution of teens, due in part to the perception it is more profitable and less risky than some other illegal enterprises.
- Many businesses in one of the region's prostitution high activity areas felt that prostitution of teens increases problems for the community, even though businesses do not always report the activity to law enforcement.
- Key informants felt the issue of prostituted teens was serious, had become worse, and that more comprehensive programs are needed in the San Diego region.

¹ As a member of the ACTION Network, SDYCS agreed to act as the fiscal agent for this grant.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Few crimes are as disturbing and unsettling to a community as the victimization of a child. One such crime that has recently garnered local attention is the commercial sexual exploitation of children² and more specifically, the prostitution of youth. With growing globalization and increases in technology have also come the growth of this industry that preys on the most vulnerable in society (Estes and Weiner, 2001). The exact number of children and youth who fall victim to sexual exploitation in the United States is unknown, with estimates ranging from 200,000 to 300,000 (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Willis and Levy, 2002). This uncertainty is true in the San Diego region as well, where the lack of a comprehensive, coordinated, and reliable system to document victims has left professionals in the field unable to quantify the scope of the problem. However, consistent with the finding that child and youth sexual exploitation tends to be more concentrated in communities near or bordering Mexico, San Diego County has the unfortunate distinction of being identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as a High Intensity Child Prostitution Area (Estes and Weiner 2001; Lerach & Viglione 2005) and nine out of ten service providers, law enforcement professionals, and educators interviewed for a study on the prostitution of teens in the San Diego Region felt it was a serious problem that warranted a regional task force to address it (Burke, Keaton, and Doroski, 2005).

In addition to the need to capture the numbers of children and youth impacted by sexual exploitation, there also appears to be a lack of attention and response to this issue across all levels nationwide. Although crimes against children often beget a cry of outrage from those communities affected by such crimes, there is a universal lack of services, policies, and interventions for these young victims (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Flores, 2002; Lerach and Viglione, 2005; Willis and Levy, 2002). Others have noted

that the nature of the crime, misconstrued public perception steeped in historically negative stereotypes of prostitutes, inconsistent legal intervention, and lack of effective leadership at the policy level all contribute to the undercounting and insufficient response to this social problem (Finkelhor & Ormrod 2004; Flores 2002; Klain, 1999). The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children publicized the common societal myths surrounding prostituted teens and how these often overshadow the underlying realities of victimization, exploitation, and coercion associated with prostitution. These myths include the false views that prostituted youth enter for financial gains or the 'glamour' of being a prostitute; that prostitution is a victimless crime; and that young girls and boys freely choose to enter prostitution. However, as described below, research has countered these myths by documenting how prior victimization (e.g., sexual abuse) paves the way for future victimization in the form of prostitution, as well as the reality associated with prostitution (e.g., violence, poverty, lack of control) (National Center For Missing and Exploited Children, 2002). Numerous studies have noted the failure of society to meet the needs of this population and have recommended the development of specialized services that target prostituted youth (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Flores, 2002; Lerach and Viglione, 2005).

Although prostitution is a crime that predominately affects girls, boys, and children as young as eight years of age fall victim to this sexual exploitation (Flores, 2002; Willis and Levy, 2002). Homeless, thrownaway, and runaway youth are especially vulnerable (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Hammer, Finkelhor, and Sedlak, 2002; Willis and Levy 2002). Research has estimated that approximately 55 percent of homeless or runaway youth engage in formal prostitution, nearly three-quarters of which involves working with a pimp. This is a staggering figure given there is an estimated 1,682,900 runaway youth in the United States. Often these individuals are victims of earlier traumas, such as child sexual abuse, as well as histories of substance use and mental health issues (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Flores, 2002;

² Commercial sexual exploitation of children includes multiple types of pornography, trafficking, and prostitution.

Hammer, Finkelhor, and Sedlak, 2002; Lerach and Viglione, 2005; Willis and Levy 2002). Once engaged in prostitution, these youth are subjected to additional physical and psychological trauma that has debilitating life consequences (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Lerach and Viglione, 2005). Violence is everywhere for these youth, with frequent reports of rape, assault, and other forms of horrific violence at the hands of solicitors and pimps (Flores, 2002). They are also exposed to numerous infectious diseases. The threat of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), human papillomavirus (HPV), Hepatitis B, gonorrhea, and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), are both real and prevalent, and if left untreated, lead to more complicated illnesses later in a youth's life (Estes and Weiner, 2001; Willis and Levy, 2002). Because of these dangers, it is vital that the medical community be a partner in any systemized response to this issue.

The research is also adamant that more attention is urgently needed to attend to this issue, especially in the form of accurate documentation, increased public awareness, legislative changes to support enforcement, and effective, research-based interventions. Conducting a community assessment is a crucial first step for any locality that is serious about tackling this social ill. Such an assessment is a consistent part of the recommendations put forth in the literature, which calls for a clear understanding of the scope of the problem and obstacles to ameliorating it prior to developing a coordinated plan to address it.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

As previously described, the community assessment for this project was designed to determine which communities are disproportionately impacted by human trafficking and child and youth sexual exploitation, identify a broad range of community partners, and determine opportunities to prevent youth from entering into prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. Specifically, the four primary goals

of the project included: (1) documenting the scope of sexually exploited youth in the San Diego region; (2) identifying the needs, both physical and emotional, of sexually exploited youth in the San Diego region; (3) identifying gaps in services for sexually exploited youth in the San Diego region; and (4) determining which factors, including environmental, and interventions, can best address the issues of sexually exploited youth in the San Diego region.

To address these goals, a number of different methodologies were used. After identifying target areas through the examination of archival data (e.g., arrest and probation data) from official sources, surveys were administered across the region to vulnerable and sexually exploited youth, and interviews were conducted with key informants and members of the business community, as described below.

Exemplifying the collaborative nature of this project, ACTION Network members with area expertise were asked to review and provide input on each of the three data collection instruments (youth survey, key informant, and business interviews). In addition, the youth survey was shared with the Social Service committee members, youth in the target population, and homeless outreach workers to ensure appropriate content and culturally sensitive language was used. The piloting of the survey with the youth proved especially beneficial in shaping how questions were asked and the length of the survey. For example, the youth stated that they felt the term "mental health" treatment was derogatory and, as a result, questions pertaining to these services were rephrased to ask if the youth wanted "someone to talk to about my feelings." Additional "slang" language was also added, but in general the youth felt the survey was respectful and the appropriate length.

Arrest and Probation Data

To identify high intensity prostitution and trafficking areas in the San Diego region, arrest and crime data were collected for calendar year 2005 (the most recent data available at the time)

and were mapped in ArcGIS using xy coordinates. All instances of prostitution were documented, regardless of the age of the individual(s) involved in the situation. Crime data measure the number of Part II offenses³ that are recorded or reported to law enforcement in the region. Arrest data measure the law enforcement response to these crimes. For the purpose of this assessment, penal codes that pertained to engaging in prostitution, soliciting the services of a prostitute (i.e., a “john” or “solicitor”), or facilitating this type of crime (i.e., a “protector” or “pimp”), were included. Both crime and arrest data were used since arrest locations could be different from crime locations. Thus, it should be noted that one instance of prostitution could result in more than one crime incident being tracked, as well as one or more arrests. Overall, a total of 2,868 crimes and arrests were available for analysis.

As a result of the mapping exercise, a set of five maps were created which visually displayed where prostitution was being documented as occurring across the region. These maps, which were shared with the ACTION Network Steering Committee in January 2007, showed areas with high prostitution activity, which included El Cajon Boulevard (primarily west of Interstate 15) and National City, with additional pockets of concentrated activity occurring in areas of Oceanside and El Cajon. This information was used to help determine where the business interviews would be conducted and also to help inform where outreach efforts to youth should be focused.

Information was also gathered to document the number of youth on probation for a prostitution-related offense. According to the San Diego County Probation Department, in 2005, 79 youth under the age of 18 had a referral for a prostitution-related offense and 50 had a true finding⁴. In 2006, these numbers had decreased slightly to 68 and 40, respectively.

³ Part II offenses are all those crimes not classified as Part I crimes. Examples include drug and alcohol offenses, weapon offenses, and prostitution.

⁴ A true finding in the juvenile justice system is essentially the equivalent of being found guilty in the adult system.

Youth Surveys

Survey Description

A sample of convenience was conducted with 200 homeless, runaway, and other vulnerable youth 25 years of age⁵ and younger. This population was selected because research has shown that homeless and runaway youth are at high-risk for both sexual exploitation and prostitution (Estes and Weiner, 2001). Research staff worked closely with ACTION Network members to create the survey instrument and pilot test it with the population to ensure the language used was appropriate and inoffensive. They also worked with members to gain access to programs and locations across the region where homeless and runaway youth congregate, including approaching youth on the streets in locations identified as areas with high prostitution activity, approaching youth at homeless residential and drop-in shelters, accompanying social service outreach workers as they approached homeless youth living outside, and conducting surveys with girls detained in the San Diego County Probation Department’s Girls’ Rehabilitation Facility (GRF). To ensure complete anonymity, no names or identifying information were collected on youth who completed the survey, nor were any services contingent upon a youth agreeing to take the survey.

The youth survey consisted of two parts, with the first section acting as a screening tool to determine if a youth had engaged in survival sex (e.g., the exchange of sexual favors for food, shelter, drugs or money) or prostitution and the second portion administered only to those youth who reported having engaged in these activities. Questions included in the first section pertained to previous and current experiences of running away and being homeless, alcohol and other drug use, abuse experienced at home, and previous mental health treatment. As part of the second section, which was only completed by

⁵ Local experts in the field noted that prostituted youth tend to overstate their age to avoid being identified as a minor. As such, researchers were encouraged to include youth who reported being over 18 years old. In addition, researchers focused survey distribution in areas where youth congregate (e.g. drop in centers, shelters).

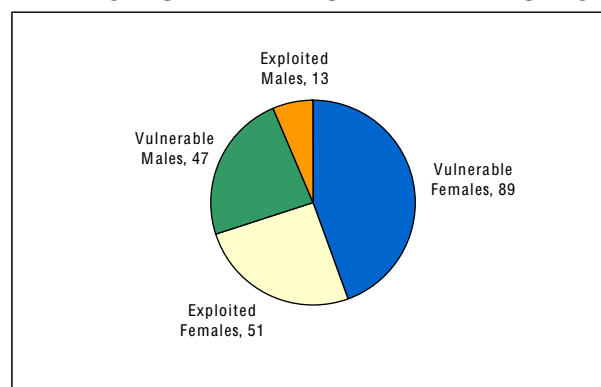
youth who reported previously engaging in prostitution or survival sex, questions were asked regarding physical health, contact with law enforcement, the nature of their prostitution experiences, and their views on discontinuing these types of encounters in the future. In exchange for their input and participation, youth were given a gift card to a local establishment.

Sample Description

As Figure 1 shows, the sample of 200 youth included 136 who were vulnerable to be exploited and did not report participation in previous prostitution activities (89 females and 47 males) and 64 who had been sexually exploited (51 females and 13 males). Worth noting, one in three (33%) of the 136 vulnerable youth reported that they had previously been asked to engage in acts of prostitution (exchanging sex for money, basic necessities, or alcohol/drugs), but had declined to do so. Overall, three-quarters (75%) described themselves as straight, 16 percent as bi-sexual, and 10 percent as gay/lesbian.

Throughout this report, data from the survey are presented collapsing across these categorizations (gender and previous sexual exploitation), unless significant differences were identified⁶. Additional information regarding the characteristics of these youth is included later in the bulletin.

Figure 1
YOUTH SURVEYED INCLUDED VULNERABLE AND SEXUALLY EXPLOITED INDIVIDUALS



TOTAL = 200

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

Key Informant Interviews

Interview Description

To supplement the youth surveys and gain another valuable perspective, research staff collaborated with ACTION Network members to identify key professionals in the field who were both knowledgeable about the issue of prostituted teens and could speak to the gaps, needs, and factors influencing the issue at a local level. A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with these individuals to garner their perspectives on the extent of the problem, what the current gaps are in the system, and what changes need to occur to effectively address the problem. A list of potential interviewees was solicited from members of the ACTION Network Steering Committee and research staff contacted the individuals to solicit their participation in the interview. No names were documented and the results were recorded in the aggregate. Because of the number of respondents, frequencies rather than percentages are presented when describing these data.

⁶ It should be noted that while some differences were statistically significant, they could be related to how sampling occurred. Therefore, any broad generalizations from these data should be made with caution and only when supported with other evidence (e.g., real life experience).

Sample Description

The 15 key informants represented a variety of perspectives, including law enforcement (4), community-based organizations (3), prosecutors (3), health care (2), probation (1), mental health (1), and health and human services (1). These individuals brought a lengthy history of experience to their positions, with an average⁷ of 14.1 years with their current organization (range = 3 to 28, *SD* = 8.4). They also reported serving communities across the region, including South Bay (12), Central (11), East (10), North Central (9), North Coastal (8), and North Inland (8).

When the eight individuals who represented organizations other than law enforcement/prosecution were asked to describe their organization's primary population, responses included youth (ages 13 to 17) (8), children (under the age of 13) (5), and adults (3). In terms of the nature of their own level/type of contact with this population, six said that they supervise staff that provides direct services, five provide direct services themselves, three work with the parents of the target population, one provides training, and one has primarily administrative responsibilities. On average, the key informants reported their agencies serve around 92.5 unduplicated youth per month (range = 9 to 175, *SD* = 82.0), with 25 percent (6 respondents) to 50 percent (1 respondent) of these individuals estimated to have engaged in acts of prostitution, almost all of whom were female.

Business Interviews

Interview Description

In order to better understand how the issue of human trafficking and child and youth sexual exploitation affects communities, interviews were also conducted with a sample of 15 businesses in National City, one of the identified

areas with high prostitution activity. This geographic area was selected because of the level of active community concern in regard to this issue and the anticipated plan that a pilot intervention could be most effectively implemented in this smaller geographical area, with lessons learned to guide future efforts. Questions on the interview, which was conducted in person and over the phone, pertained to respondents' perception of the problem and possible solutions. No names were documented and the results were recorded in the aggregate. Again, due to the number of interviews conducted, frequencies rather than percentages are presented.

Sample Description

The 15 businesses represented a variety of organizations, including motels (5), restaurants (4), and other retail establishments (6). The individuals interviewed included owners, managers, and clerks. On average, these individuals reported working at the business an average (median) of 3.0 years (range = .3 to 17.0, *SD* = 5.4). When asked what days they usually work, almost all (14) said weekdays and around half (8) also said weekends. When asked what time of day they usually work, almost all (13) said mornings, all said afternoons (15), around one-third (6) said evenings, and one-fifth (3) said after regular business hours.

SCOPE OF PROSTITUTED TEENS IN THE SAN DIEGO REGION

How serious of an issue is child and youth sexual exploitation to the region?

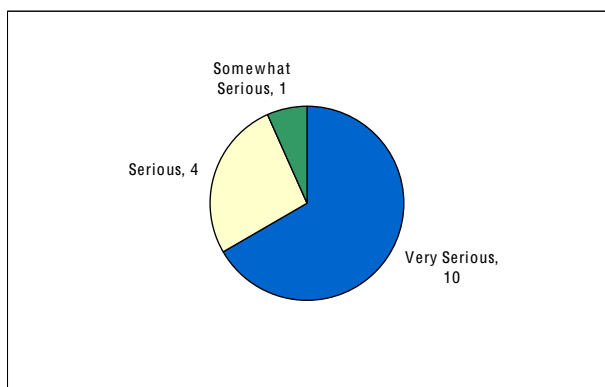
Key Informant Perspective

As part of the key informant interview, respondents were asked to describe the scope of the problem for the region, including where it occurs, as well as how and why the problem has changed over time. As Figure 2 shows, the key informants interviewed felt that the issue of prostituted teens is a serious one for the region, with 14 of the 15 respondents describing it as

⁷ When distributions are skewed (with one or more responses of extremely high or low values), the median is used to describe the "average". Otherwise, means are presented.

“very serious” or “serious”. When asked if they thought the problem had become worse/increased over the past five years, 13 felt that it had and 2 felt that it had stayed the same. In addition, nine of eleven respondents noted that compared to a year ago, the number of youth that their agencies served who had engaged in prostitution had increased.

Figure 2
MOST KEY INFORMANTS FEEL THE PROSTITUTION OF TEENS IS A VERY SERIOUS ISSUE FOR THE SAN DIEGO REGION



TOTAL = 15

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

When asked to describe what factors contributed to the increase in the number of sexually exploited youth, eight individuals pointed to the growth of the Internet and five felt increased involvement from gangs was related. One informant noted that “Organized crime realizes there’s money to be generated by pimping young girls. Prostitution is replacing narcotics because they’ve realized there is a lower risk of getting caught.” Other factors that were cited as contributing to the increase included other youth-related issues (such as lack of adult supervision, more drug use, more female crime) (5), less stigma/more cultural acceptance of prostitution (4), more attention to the issue leading to more reporting (3), not enough community resources (2), and not enough law enforcement resources (2).

In terms of where in the region they thought the prostitution of teens typically occurs, responses

included specific cities, as well as areas within those cities. Specifically, of the 15 respondents,

- ten noted the City of San Diego including El Cajon Boulevard (6), University Avenue (1), Balboa Park (1), Clairemont (1), La Jolla (1), Clairemont Mesa (1), and Downtown (1);
- four noted the City of Oceanside, with two making specific note of activity around Mission Street (1) and Hill Street (1);
- five noted National City in general, and others made specific note of Roosevelt Avenue (4), Main Street (2), National City Boulevard (2), and Plaza Boulevard (1); and
- one noted Main Street in the City of El Cajon.

Additionally, two individuals said the prostitution of teens occurs “everywhere”, one that it occurs around inexpensive motels, and one that it happens around parks and recreation centers.

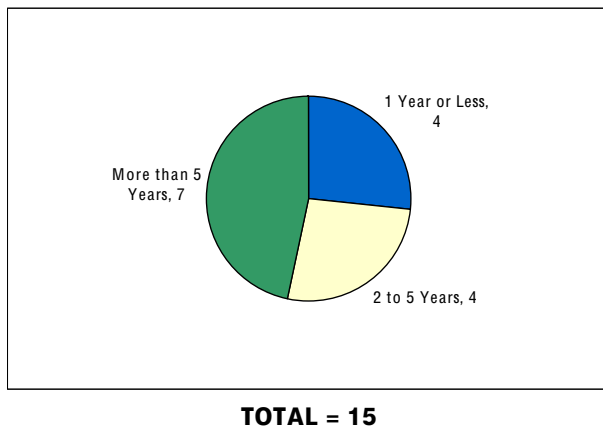
Business Perspective

The businesses who were interviewed were asked to describe the scope of the problem in their neighborhood, including when they noticed the problem, when they first thought it was an issue, and whether they thought it had grown worse over time. As Figure 3 shows, about half of the business respondents had noticed the problem in the last year (4) or in the past two to five years (4), while the rest felt it had been an issue for an even longer period of time (7). The businesses were evenly distributed when asked if they thought the problem of prostitution had become worse – five thought it had increased, five thought it had decreased, and five thought it had fluctuated over time. Reasons cited for why the problem has decreased (overall or at times) included the effectiveness of police targeted activities (4), the installation of surveillance cameras (3), and efforts on the part

of the community to work together (1). A variety of perceptions were also shared about why the problem may have increased over time, including that there was more demand (2), a shift in focus/priorities by law enforcement (2), greater cultural acceptance of prostitution/pimping (1), and that the prostitution rings had become more organized and aggressive (1).

The majority of businesses (14) reported that they see prostitution everyday or almost everyday they work, including afternoons (12), early evenings (12), mornings (10), evenings (7), and late evenings (7). Respondents reported seeing an average of 4.6 teen prostitutes a day (range = 1 to 10, $SD = 2.7$), and when asked to describe how they know a teen is engaging in prostitution, described particular clothing or apparel (11) or behavior (9) as a tip-off. Around half (7) of those interviewed felt that the number of prostituted teens has increased over time.

Figure 3
MOST BUSINESSES SURVEYED REPORT PROSTITUTION HAS BEEN AN ISSUE FOR MORE THAN ONE YEAR



SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Business Interviews, 2007

What effect does prostitution have on these communities?

As part of the business interview, respondents were given a list of seven different negative activities and were asked if they had ever observed any of these problems and whether

they had been caused by prostitutes, pimps, or johns. Overall, 11 of the 15 businesses reported they had witnessed at least one of these negative activities, with an average of 5.5 problems observed (range = 2 to 12, $SD = 2.9$). As Table 1 shows, the most common problem reported by these businesses included fighting, other acts of violence, defecating/urinating in public, and vandalism. Pimps and prostitutes were equally likely to be described as being involved in these negative activities, while johns were noted as being involved much less frequently⁸.

Table 1
BUSINESSES HAVE OBSERVED A NUMBER OF NEGATIVE ACTIVITIES RELATED TO PROSTITUTION

Fighting	11
Acts of violence	7
Defecating/urinating in public	5
Vandalism	4
Drug sales	4
Gang activity	3
Drug use	2
TOTAL	11

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Business Interviews, 2007

When asked if these problems had increased in frequency or type over time, five responded affirmatively to each (either noting it had increased or fluctuated over time). When asked the reason for these changes, responses included that it was related to the amount of law enforcement activity, changes in economic trends, change of seasons, more pimps, and the involvement of gangs. One business respondent noted "The police will patrol, which will slow it down for a while, then the police leave and the activity comes back." During the same time period, five of the respondents also reported

⁸ When asked how they know an individual is a john, ten respondents noted they observe the person picking up or dropping a prostitute off and eight said they notice the person driving around in a distinctive fashion.

that they thought crime in the community had increased or fluctuated.

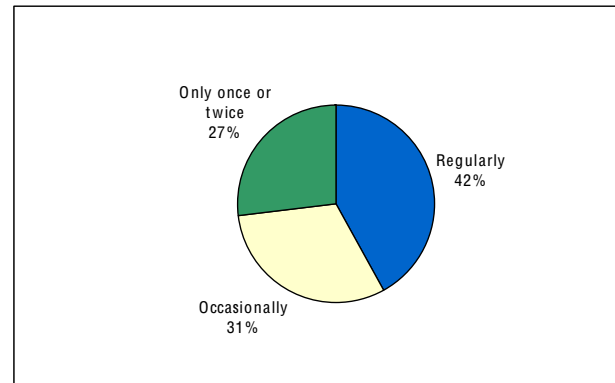
In another series of questions, the businesses were asked if they had ever seen where the sexually exploited youth and johns go to engage in sexual acts. Eight of the individuals interviewed said they had, with locations including cars (6), hotels/motels (4), streets or alleys (4), other outdoor areas (2), public restrooms (1), and abandoned buildings (1).

When asked if they had taken any steps to directly intervene when they had seen prostitution or related activity (rather than contacting law enforcement), ten respondents said they had, noting that they deny services (5), talk to other businesses (2), talk to the prostituted youth and try to help them (2), and have entered into confrontations with the individuals involved (1).

What is the nature of the teen's involvement in prostitution?

As part of the youth survey, respondents were asked how often and how recently they had engaged in any acts of prostitution, as well as what they exchanged sex or sexual favors for. As Figures 4 and 5 show, most of the sexually exploited youth surveyed reported engaging in prostitution or survival sex on an occasional or regular basis and that they had done so in the past year. These responses were consistent with the impression of the businesses, 13 of whom reported observing the prostituted teens on a regular (rather than occasional) basis.

Figure 4
THREE IN FOUR SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH REPORT OCCASIONAL OR REGULAR PROSTITUTION ACTIVITIES

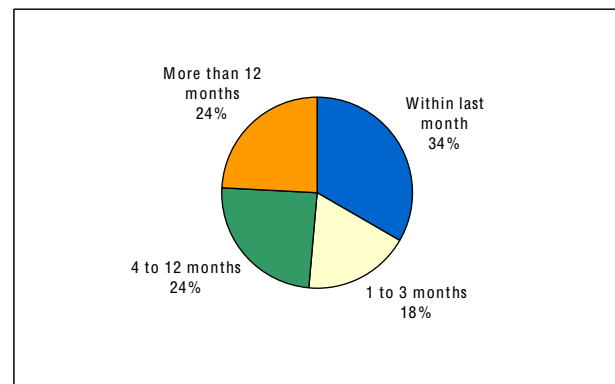


TOTAL = 59

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

Figure 5
THREE IN FOUR SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH WERE ENGAGED IN PROSTITUTION IN THE PAST YEAR



TOTAL = 62

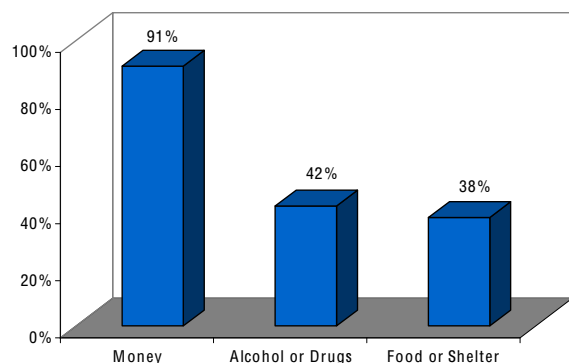
NOTE: Cases with missing information not included. Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

In terms of what they had ever traded sex or sexual favors for, 91 percent reported ever exchanging sex or sexual favors for money, 42 percent for alcohol/drugs, and 38 percent for basic necessities (food or shelter) (Figure 6). In a follow-up question, when asked what they *most* commonly exchange sex for, 76 percent said money, 15 percent said basic necessities, and

10 percent said alcohol/drugs. Over half (56%) of these youth also reported they had been approached in the past by someone asking them to make a film. Of those who said they had been approached, 58 percent said they had agreed to do so⁹.

Figure 6
MOST SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH
REPORTED EXCHANGING SEX FOR MONEY



TOTAL = 64

NOTE: Percentages based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

What, if any, are the trafficking patterns of sexually exploited youth?

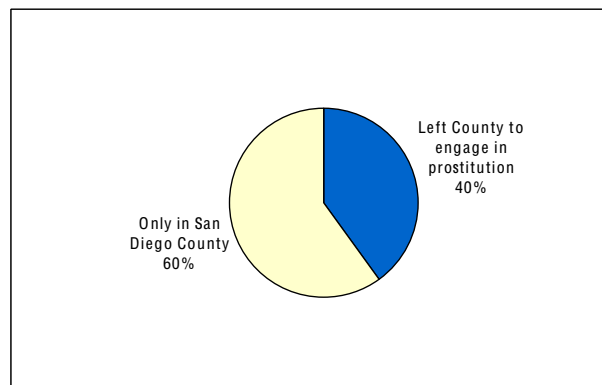
Youth Perspective

Fifty-eight of the 64 sexually exploited youth answered a question pertaining to whether they had ever left San Diego County to engage in prostitution or survival sex. As Figure 7 shows, two in five (or 40%) reported they had and 60 percent said they had not. When these 23 individuals were asked where they had traveled to, 91 percent said another California county [Los Angeles (8), Orange (6), Fresno (3), Riverside (2), Sacramento (2), Oakland (2), Alameda (1), Bakersfield (1), and Santa Clara (1)], 48 percent another state [Arizona (6),

⁹ Males who were sexually exploited were significantly more likely to say they had been approached to make a film (85% of the 13), compared to females (48% of the 50). However, there was no significant difference in terms of how many reported agreeing to do so.

Nevada (4), Illinois (2), Texas (2), Georgia (1), New Mexico (1), Oregon (1), and Washington (1)], and 9 percent said another country (Mexico). Twenty (20) of these youth also answered a follow-up question regarding how they got to these locations – nine said their pimp took them, seven said they went themselves, and four said both occurred.

Figure 7
TWO IN FIVE SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH
HAD ENGAGED IN PROSTITUTION OUTSIDE
SAN DIEGO COUNTY



TOTAL = 58

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

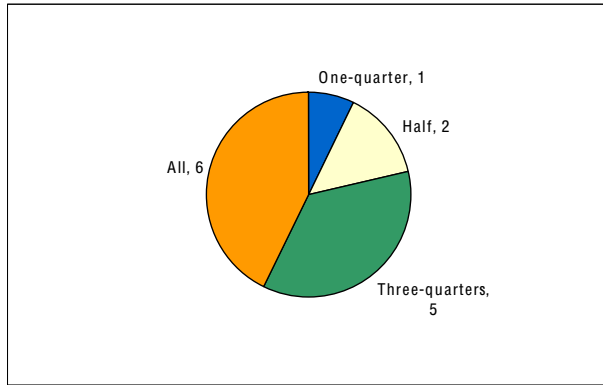
SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

Key Informant Perspective

As part of the key informant interview, respondents were asked for their opinion regarding whether sexually exploited youth in San Diego County are originally from here, or somewhere else, as well as how often they are taken to other places outside the region to perform sexual acts. As Figure 8 shows, 11 of the 14 key informants who answered the question thought that the majority, if not all (three-quarters or all) of sexually exploited youth were from San Diego County. Fewer individuals (9 total) felt comfortable estimating how many leave the region to engage in prostitution – five said half or fewer and four said three-quarters or more (Figure 9). When asked how these youth got to these other places, eight of the nine respondents said they were forced or convinced to go by their pimp, four that they went on their

own (at least initially), and two that they were forced to go by someone else.

Figure 8
MOST KEY INFORMANTS PERCEIVE MOST SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH ARE FROM THE SAN DIEGO REGION

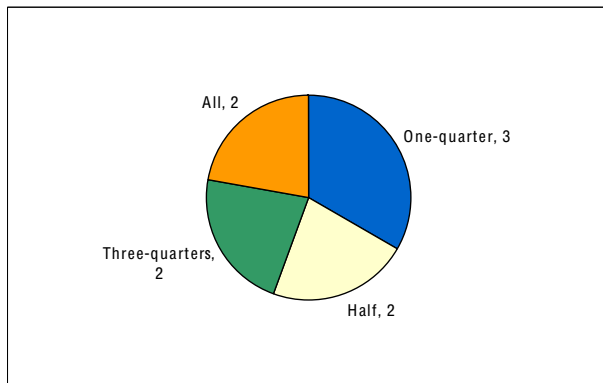


TOTAL = 14

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

Figure 9
KEY INFORMANTS MIXED ON HOW OFTEN SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH LEAVE THE COUNTY TO ENGAGE IN PROSTITUTION



TOTAL = 9

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

When asked what other locations these youth travel to, the most common responses included other Southern California counties (11, including Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino), other western states (11,

including Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington), other states (5, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, New York, Texas, and the District of Columbia), Mexico (5), other counties in California (4, including San Francisco), and other foreign countries (1).

Business Perspective

Businesses were also asked if they thought the teen prostitutes they observed were from San Diego County or somewhere else. While 6 of the 15 did not know, 7 individuals felt the girls were from San Diego County (including 1 who said they were from the neighborhood and 6 from other parts of the County), 3 noted that they came from other states, and 1 said they were from other areas in California.

What role do pimps have in the prostitution of youth?

Youth Perspective

According to 56 sexually exploited youth who exchanged sex for money, almost half (48%) reported that they kept it all for themselves, while the other half (52%) reported giving it to someone else. When these 29 youth were asked who they gave their money to, the most common responses were their pimp (76%), a friend (21%), their boyfriend (21%), another girl or boy (7%), or a parent (7%). As Table 2 shows, most of these youth felt that this individual offered protection ("from other pimps", 70% and "on the street", 67%) and one-third (33%) to two-fifths (41%) also expressed positive feelings for this person, including that the pimp wanted them to be together and wanted what was best for them. At the same time however, a similar amount also reported that they had been beaten up by this individual (42%), and about one-quarter had been forced to have sex with him or someone else (29% and 21%, respectively).

Around half (52%) of the youth said they had recruited others to work for their pimp, or the person they gave their money to. When 13 of these individuals (which included 2 male and

11 females) were asked why they recruited others, the most common response was that they wanted to help the pimp (11) or friend (2) make more money. In addition, two individuals reported they would get a cut of the money by referring someone else and one said she would be beaten up if she did not do so.

Table 2
BEHAVIOR OF “PIMP” TOWARD SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

Positive Behavior	
Protects me from other pimps	70%
Protects me on the street	67%
Wants us to be together	41%
Helps me save money	37%
Wants the best for me	33%
TOTAL	27
Negative Behavior	
Takes me to a different place	46%
Beats me up	42%
Forces me to have sex with him	29%
Forces me to have sex with someone else	21%
Threatens my family or friends	13%
Holds me against my will	8%
TOTAL	24

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

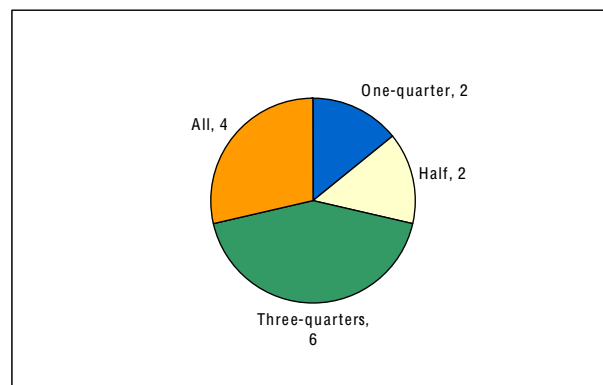
Key Informant Perspective

The key informants who were interviewed perceived that most of the sexually exploited youth had a pimp, as Figure 10 shows. When asked if this percentage varied for males and females, 6 of the 15 respondents said it did, with males being less likely to have a pimp, compared to females (the other 9 reported that they did not know).

When asked to describe other characteristics of local pimps, the respondents noted that they thought most were 18 years of age or older (13 of 14) and that they were in charge of 5.0

prostitutes on average (median) (range = 2 through 20, SD = 6.9).

Figure 10
MANY KEY INFORMANTS PERCEIVE THAT MOST SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH HAVE A PIMP



TOTAL = 14

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

As Table 3 shows, the key informants perceived that pimps recruit youth through a variety of methods, including psychological manipulation (e.g., promising love, building self-esteem), enticements (e.g., clothes, drugs), other prostitutes, and gangs.

When asked for their perspective regarding what the greatest challenges are when trying to reduce the activity of pimps, the most common response from the key informants was that it is often difficult to build a case or prosecute a pimp because the youth will not testify against him (10). Others also noted that it can be a difficult job with few available resources, that the pimps can be very sophisticated, that current laws and sentences are too weak, and it is difficult to identify/arrest pimps in the first place. Similar sentiments were expressed in a later question posed solely to law enforcement/prosecution professionals regarding challenges they face when arresting or convicting pimps, with these individuals noting that they do not always receive cooperation from the prostitute (3), it is difficult to get necessary information (2), and that there is a lack

of understanding regarding this issue (1). Two (of five law enforcement) respondents also noted that the current sentences for pimps are too lenient.

Table 3
KEY INFORMANTS REPORT PIMPS USE
VARIOUS RECRUITMENT METHODS

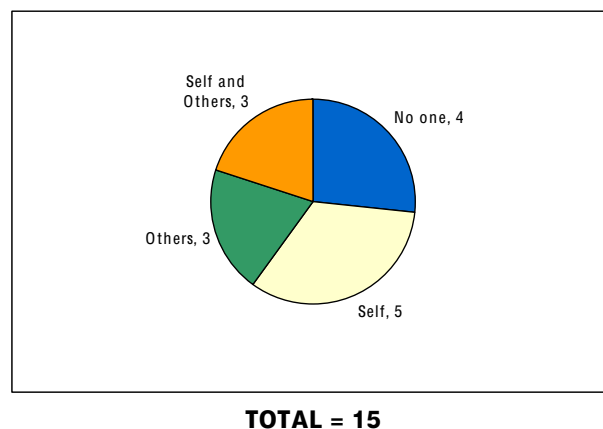
Psychological manipulation	13
Enticements	11
Other prostitutes	11
Gang members	10
Around schools	8
In neighborhoods	8
Physical threats/acts	6
Family members	3
TOTAL	15

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

Business Perspective

The majority of the businesses interviewed (13 of the 15) reported that they had previously seen pimps in their community. When asked to describe how they recognize a pimp, comments referred to distinctive behavior (such as how they interact with the youth) (7), attire or accessories (6), that they fight with the prostitutes (2), their efforts to solicit other girls (2), and their age (1). Eleven of the 15 respondents also reported that they had been harassed or had a negative interaction with a pimp (8) or had known others in the community who had these types of experiences (6) (Figure 11). When asked the nature of this negative interaction, responses included they or others had been propositioned, been the victim of a crime (e.g., breaking and entering), or had exchanged negative words with those individuals.

Figure 11
MOST BUSINESSES HAD BEEN OR KNEW
OTHERS WHO HAD BEEN HARASSED BY
PIMPS



SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Business Interviews, 2007

What role do gangs have in the prostitution of youth?

Youth Perspective

When the sexually exploited youth were asked specifically whether gangs are involved in prostitution, 56 percent said they are, 29 percent said they are not, and 15 percent said they did not know. Eleven youth also reported that they had been approached by a gang to become involved in prostitution, three of whom did so as a result.

When the youth who reported gang involvement in prostitution were asked if they knew which gangs are involved, 18 individuals responded affirmatively, but only 7 described which gangs they were. These responses included Lincoln Park (3), Bloods and Crips (2), 5/9 Brims (2), South Side (2), South Crest Park (2), Skyline (1), and West Coast (1).

Key Informant Perspective

When the key informants were asked if gangs had any role in pimping, 13 said they did, 1 said they did not, and 1 did not know. When the 13 were further probed regarding what this role was, all 13 said gangs act as pimps, 12 as recruiters, 10 as “enforcers” for pimps, and 8 as traffickers. Only one individual thought female gang members are prostitutes themselves. When asked what gangs are involved in prostitution, they shared some of the same names the youth did, as well as others, including Pimping Hos Daily (PHD) (10), Bloods and Crips (3), Money Over Bitches (2), Black Men Working (1), Gangsta Pimp Mafia (1), Scandalous Pimps (1), Lincoln Park (1), Old Town National City (OTNC) (1), Logan (1), and Market Street (1).

Additionally, 10 of the 15 key informants felt that the level of gang involvement in pimping and the prostitution of teens has increased over time and 7 out of 9 respondents felt the nature of gang involvement had changed. When asked why gangs have become more involved, six individuals noted that gangs realize they can make easy money this way, three thought society glamorizes the connection between gangs and pimps, and one thought the growth of the Internet was also responsible. As one respondent noted, “Gangs are starting to realize it is more profitable. You can sell a girl over and over again, but you can only sell drugs once.” When asked how gang involvement has changed, two each noted they have become more organized/sophisticated, are more involved in recruiting and tracking, and are more directly involved. One thought they are more violent.

How are johns involved in this issue?

A few questions were included in the key informant interview regarding individuals who solicit the services of sexually exploited youth. Overall, 11 of 13 respondents thought that “johns” are typically 18 years of age or older and 9 felt that those who engage youth in acts of prostitution know that they are under the age of 18. When asked about laws related to johns,

most (10 of the 13 who answered the question) felt that sentences for these individuals are currently “too easy” (with the other 3 saying they were appropriate). When law enforcement was asked specifically what challenges they face in arresting or convicting johns, their responses included that there is a lack of resources to target these individuals (4), it can be difficult to prove or get a prostitute to testify (2), and many times prostitution is seen as a victimless crime (1).

What is the response of law enforcement to this problem?

Youth Perspective

The sexually exploited youth were asked a number of questions regarding their previous contact with law enforcement. Overall, just under half (49%) reported they had been either arrested or picked up by police for activities related to survival sex or prostitution and the median number of previous arrests was 1.0 (range = 1 to 12, SD = 3.4). More than three-quarters (77%) reported that at least one of these arrests had occurred in San Diego County. When further queried regarding what the officer did as a result of this contact, most reported that they were taken to juvenile hall (63%), with others noting they were given a warning (33%), arrested for another crime (25%), cited or ticketed (17%), taken home (21%), taken to jail (13%), or taken to a shelter (4%).

Key Informant Perspective

When the law enforcement key informants were asked if their agency had a formal policy or procedure of what to do when encountering a sexually exploited youth, all four of the respondents said no. When further asked what they personally do when they witness acts of teen prostitution, they offered a variety of options, including arresting the youth and taking him/her to juvenile hall (3), arresting the pimp (3), arresting the youth for a crime other than prostitution (3), taking the youth home (2), talking to the youth and asking him/her to move on (2), taking the youth to a community-based organization (2), referring the youth to a social

service agency (2), transporting him/her to the Polinsky Center (1), and issuing a citation (1).

Business Perspective

The businesses who were interviewed also offered their experiences of interacting with law enforcement on this and other related issues. Overall, while businesses appeared to be somewhat hesitant to report prostitution activity (with only 6 ever reporting it), they were somewhat more likely (8) to report other illegal acts, such as violence or drug use, that were related to it¹⁰. For example, while only three individuals said they always report teen prostitution activity they observe, six reported they always report other related illegal behavior. When asked what response they had received from police when calling about prostitution activity, responses included that the police talked to that individual who had called for service (5), the sexually exploited youth was arrested (4), the sexually exploited youth (3) or john (1) was told to leave, or that the pimp was arrested (1). One individual also said that the police failed to respond to the call for service. Similar responses were also offered when asked about the response when calling about other related activity.

When the nine who said they had never reported the activity, although they had observed it, were asked why, the most common response was that it was not their business (6), the police will not do anything about it (2), or the police already know about it (1).

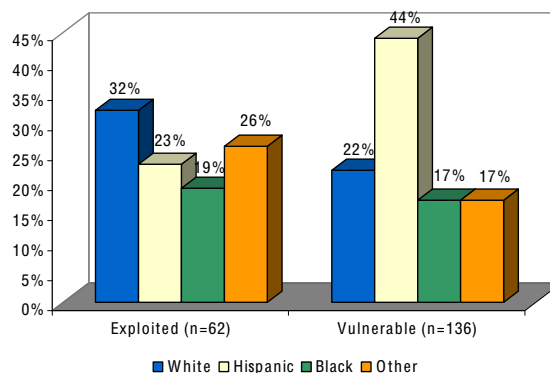
PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

What are the characteristics of vulnerable and sexually exploited youth and have they changed over time?

Youth Perspective

The sample of surveyed youth was ethnically diverse overall, with around one-third describing themselves as Hispanic/Latino, one-quarter as White, and one-fifth as Black. However, it is worth noting that this breakdown approached statistical significance when comparing the two groups, with the sexually exploited youth including a greater percentage of White youth and youth of other ethnicities, and a smaller proportion of Hispanic/Latino youth, compared to those who were included in the vulnerable group (Figure 12). The vulnerable youth were slightly younger (16.5 years of age on average, range = 8 to 25, SD = 2.5), than the sexually exploited youth group (17.8 years of age on average, range = 13 to 24, SD = 2.6).

Figure 12
SURVEYED YOUTH WERE ETHNICALLY DIVERSE



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

¹⁰ These eight individuals included the six who also reported prostitution activity specifically, as well as two additional business representatives.

Key Informant Perspective

Key informants were asked to estimate the age of the sexually exploited youth they came into contact with, as well as to describe factors that may be related to their involvement in the prostitution of teens. According to most of the key informants interviewed (9), sexually exploited youth were younger than before (as opposed to older or staying the same age) and the average age of sexually exploited youth that their agency serves, was between 13 and 15 years old (8) and 16 to 18 (6).

As Table 4 shows, in terms of describing reasons that sexually exploited youth may get involved in this activity, the most common responses included the youth's desire to obtain personal spending money, it provides a sense of belonging when the youth lacks strong family connections, and they are often coerced into it.

Table 4
DIFFERENT REASONS CITED FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PROSTITUTION BY KEY INFORMANTS

Personal spending money	11
Provides sense of belonging	9
Coerced	9
Buy alcohol/drugs	6
Peer pressure	5
Family history of prostitution	2
Lack of awareness	1
TOTAL	15

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

Business Perspective

As part of the business interview, questions were included regarding the perceived characteristics of sexually exploited youth, as well as perceptions of how and why a youth may find him/herself involved in prostitution activities. In terms of age, the perception of the businesses interviewed was that some (9) or most (5) of the prostitutes in the area were teens. Additionally,

six individuals felt that they had become younger over time and eight felt that they were about the same age as they had always been.

When the business representatives were asked their opinion regarding why some youth become involved in prostitution, they had differing points of view, including that some do it for the money (9), in order to buy drugs (6), or for the excitement (1). Others felt that some individuals are forced to do it (6), they are just trying to meet their survival needs (4), they have a bad family life (4), or they have mental health or abuse issues (2). One person each also felt that the individuals do it just because they want to, they do not realize what they are getting into, or that the media glamorizes it. When asked if they thought a youth who engaged in prostitution could stop whenever s/he wanted, only six said yes.

What are the primary needs reported by youth who have engaged in prostitution or survival sex?

As part of the youth interview, questions were included in the first section which pertained to previous and current episodes of running away from home and having no place to stay, educational history, abuse, and alcohol and other drug use. As previously noted, if there were no differences between vulnerable and sexually exploited youth, responses are presented collapsing across this dimension. In the second section of the survey, which was only completed by youth who had engaged in acts of prostitution, questions were included that related to physical health, safe sex practices, and prior victimization.

Runaway/Homelessness

Overall, most of the youth surveyed reported that they had run away, either sometime in the past (33%), currently (2%), or both (41%). Additional analyses also revealed that the sexually exploited youth were significantly more likely to report being a current runaway (62%)

or to have run away in the past (89%), compared to those described as vulnerable (33% and 67%, respectively).

When all of the youth who had previously run away were asked additional questions pertaining to these experiences, the following was revealed:

- these youth had run away a median of 4.0 times (range = 1 to 201, SD = 20.6);
- they were 13.4 years of age, on average when they first ran away (range = 6 to 17, SD = 1.9); and
- the longest time they had ever stayed away, on average, was 60.0 days (median) (range = 1 to 1,825, SD = 289.9).

Of the 73 who were current runaways, the average (median) length of time they had been gone from their most recent residence was 30.0 days (range = 1 to 1,095, SD = 184.4). When asked where they were living when they ran away, around half (53%) said at home, 14 percent said with a friend or relatives, 10 percent said a group home, and the rest said a foster home, shelter, or described some other type of residence. When asked if they could return there if they wanted to, around two in three (62%) said they could (19% said no and 19% said they did not know). When asked the reason they could not return, common responses included they were not welcome there any more (44%), they were too old or it was no longer an option (28%), or it was their personal choice not to return (28%). Additionally, 66 percent noted that the reason they ran away from home was related to some type of abuse situation (as defined in Table 4) that was perpetrated by a family member or family friend.

The vast majority (90%) of the youth surveyed reported that they lived in San Diego County before they ran away (this most recent time). Of the 11 who reported living elsewhere, 7 said they came from another state (including Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Illinois, and Georgia) and 4 from another California county (Fresno, Los Angeles, and Riverside). When asked how they had arrived in San Diego,

the most common response was “on my own” (8), with others reporting they came with a friend (2) or were brought by someone against their will (1).

In a separate set of questions, the surveyed youth were asked if they had ever been or were currently homeless (or without a permanent place to stay). Just over half (52%) reported they were currently or had ever been homeless (9% were currently homeless for the first time, 24% had been homeless in the past, and 19% were homeless in the past and currently). Most (90%) of these youth had also reported previously running away. Those youth who were currently homeless most often reported sleeping in a shelter (42%), outdoors (37%), or at a friend’s home (19%)¹¹. On average (median), these youth had been homeless for 142.5 days (range = 2 to 2,160, SD = 478.3).

Education

More than two-thirds (69%) of youth surveyed reported that they were currently attending school, or if they were not, that they had already graduated (19%). Worth noting, sexually exploited youth were significantly more likely to report they were *not* currently attending school (26%), compared to those described as vulnerable (11%). Of the 24 youth who said they were not currently in school, 58 percent said they planned to return, 17 percent said they did not plan to return, and 25 percent did not know. Of those youth who had dropped out, most had dropped out after completing the tenth or eleventh grade (71%).

Abuse and Victimization

In the first section of the youth survey, respondents were asked if a family member or family friend had ever taken one of six abusive actions against them. Analyses revealed that the sexually exploited youth were significantly more

¹¹ Those who reported being homeless previously were more likely to report sleeping at a friend’s house (63%) or outside (52%) in the past, and less likely to report sleeping at a shelter (26%). This difference may be related to the strategies used to identify youth to be surveyed.

likely to report being abused (84%), compared to those who were vulnerable (64%). As Table 5 shows, half or more of those who were abused reported being “hit, slapped, choked, or pushed” (83%), “talked badly to” (79%), or “made afraid for their safety” (53%). Of those who reported any abuse, the mean number of affirmative responses was 3.1 (range = 1 to 6, *SD* = 1.6).

Table 5
ABUSIVE ACTIONS TAKEN AGAINST YOUTH

Hit, slapped, choked, or pushed	83%
Talked badly to them	79%
Made them afraid for their safety	53%
Out of control due to alcohol/ drugs	42%
Touched inappropriately	30%
Forced sexual interaction	23%
TOTAL	132

NOTE: Percentages based on number of respondents who reported any abuse.

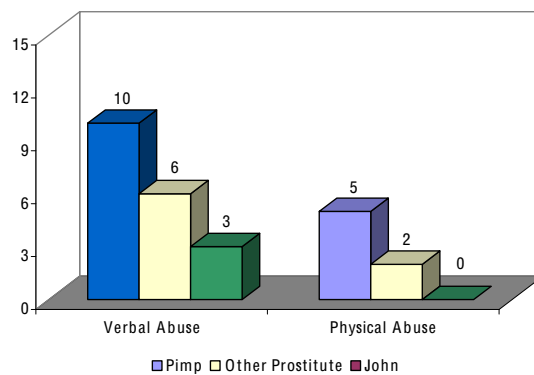
SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

Sexually exploited youth were also asked if they had ever been a victim of a crime by a stranger or acquaintance. Almost two-thirds (63%) said that they had, describing victimizations that included both violent incidents (26 said they were victims of rape, 23 assault, and 14 robbery) and property incidents (21 said they were victims of theft). Worth noting, the businesses who were surveyed were asked if they had ever observed a prostituted teen being verbally or physically abused, and if so, by whom. Overall, 11 of those interviewed said they had witnessed verbal abuse and 6 had witnessed physical abuse. As Figure 13 shows, this abuse was most often at the hands of a pimp, followed by other prostitutes.

Many of the key informants (9) noted that they felt the level of violence that a sexually exploited youth is vulnerable of experiencing has increased since they first became aware of the issue (with the other 5 saying it had stayed the same). When asked to describe why this might be, three noted

it was related to a greater level of gang involvement, three said violence was being used by pimps to a greater extent to control prostitutes, two felt society is more violent in general, and one said that more competition has led to more violence.

Figure 13
PERPETRATORS OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE OF TEEN PROSTITUTES ACCORDING TO BUSINESSES



TOTAL = 11

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Business Interviews, 2007

Alcohol and Other Drug Use

The majority (78%) of surveyed youth reported that they had previously used alcohol or other drugs. However, as Table 6 shows, the sexually exploited youth who had used alcohol/drugs reported a somewhat different history than the vulnerable youth, with a significantly greater percentage reporting previous use of ecstasy, illegal prescription, LSD, PCP, and heroin.

On average, this substance use started at relatively early ages (e.g., alcohol use at age 12; marijuana at 13, meth at 15, and ecstasy at 15). A number of the youth who had ever tried a substance had also used it in the past 30 days (including 57% for alcohol, 54% marijuana, 43% meth, 38% ecstasy, 38% illegal prescription drugs, and 37% cocaine)¹².

¹² Forty percent (40%) of the 155 youth who reported ever trying any alcohol or other drug reported use in the past 30 days.

Table 6
SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH MORE
LIKELY TO HAVE PREVIOUSLY USED A
GREATER NUMBER OF SUBSTANCES

	Exploited Youth	Vulnerable Youth
Alcohol	96%	94%
Marijuana	93%	88%
Meth	52%	40%
Ecstasy*	48%	20%
Cocaine	39%	29%
Illegal prescription*	36%	17%
LSD*	21%	7%
PCP*	18%	6%
Heroin*	16%	2%
TOTAL	56	96

*Significant at $p < .05$.

NOTE: Percentages based on number of respondents who reported any alcohol/drug use.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

Of the 155 youth who reported ever using alcohol or other drugs and answered follow-up questions, 46 percent reported they had received alcohol or other drug treatment in the past and only 21 percent (33 individuals, which included 24 who had previously received treatment and 9 who had not) said they were interested in getting help to stop them from future use¹³. Of these, 29 answered a follow-up question regarding why they have not sought help if they wanted it. Their responses included that they had tried to get treatment in the past and it did not help (34%), did not want to stay at a treatment facility (28%), did not have insurance (28%), did not want the program to contact their family (24%), did not know where to go (24%), and did not have a way to get there (21%).

¹³ Sexually exploited youth were significantly more likely to report having received alcohol/drug treatment in the past (51% versus 30% for vulnerable youth) and also report they needed help now (32% versus 15%).

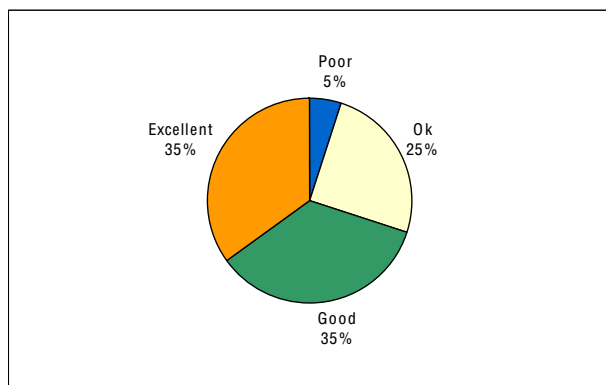
Emotional/Mental Health

Overall, more than half (57%) of the youth surveyed reported that they had previously received counseling or treatment for their emotional/mental health needs. Also worth noting, while few of the youth surveyed reported the desire to get help related to their substance use (21%, as previously noted), almost half (47%) reported that if they had the opportunity they would like to talk to someone about things that had been bothering them. When 28 youth answered a question regarding why they had not sought help with current emotional needs, their responses included that they did not know where to go (46%), did not have the time (29%), did not have insurance (21%), did not want the provider to contact their parents (21%), had bad experiences in the past when they sought help (18%), did not want to take medication (18%), and had no way to get there (11%).

Physical Health

As part of the second half of the survey, sexually exploited youth were asked a number of questions pertaining to their medical history and current health status. Overall, the majority (70%) of the youth reported that their current health was either “good” (35%) or “excellent” (35%) (Figure 14) and that they did not think they currently had a reason to see a doctor (75%). Additionally, 71 percent said they had seen a doctor in the previous three months.

Figure 14
MOST SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH FEEL
THEIR HEALTH IS GOOD OR EXCELLENT



TOTAL = 63

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

When individuals who indicated they had a reason to see a doctor, but had not done so, were asked why, the most common reasons were they did not have insurance (7), not want the doctor to contact their parents (6), not want medical personnel to ask them personal questions (5), not have a way to get there (3), not have the time to go (3), not have the motivation to go (2), not know where to go (2), and not have the ability because s/he was locked up (1). Two other individuals also indicated they had tried to go, but had a negative experience and were treated badly by the medical staff.

In terms of prior emergency room (ER) care, approximately four in five (81%) of the sexually exploited youth indicated they had previously been seen in the ER, two-thirds of whom (33 of the 51) had done so within the last year. When asked to describe why they had to go to the ER, the most common response was some type of illness, including STDs (50%), with others indicating it was due to a violence-related or other physical injury (32%), pregnancy-related¹⁴

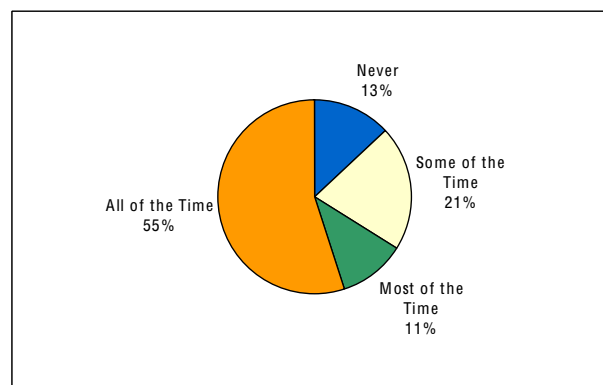
¹⁴ Four of the 51 sexually-exploited girls indicated that they were currently pregnant (1) or had previously been pregnant (3). For the latter three, one had miscarried, one had terminated the pregnancy, and one had given the child up for adoption.

(8%), drug-related (5%), or mental health-related (5%).

When asked about whether they had ever been tested for an STD, 90 percent responded affirmatively and 95 percent of these 54 individuals also reported that they had received the results of their tests. When asked if they had ever had an STD, more than one in four (29%) reported that they had. When 16 of these 18 individuals described which type of STD they previously had, their responses included chlamydia (12), gonorrhea (6), HPV (3), herpes (2), crabs (2), HIV (1), Hepatitis B (1), and pelvic inflammatory disease (1).

As Figure 15 shows, only around half (55%) of these youth indicated they always used a condom when engaging in sexual acts and around one in ten (13%) reported never using one. Additional analyses revealed that individuals who reported they most often exchanged sex for things other than money were *more* likely to never use a condom (27%), compared to those who primarily had monetary exchanges (7%). When asked why they do not always use a condom, responses included they wanted to please the male partner (8) or that they just did not have one available (3).

Figure 15
MANY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH REPORT
NOT USING CONDOMS



TOTAL = 62

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

GAPS IN SERVICES FOR SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

What are the perceived service needs of sexually exploited youth?

Youth Perspective

The sexually exploited youth (regardless of their current status or desire to stop engaging in prostitution) were asked if there was a place or program that could help them stop prostitution or survival sex, would they be interested in it. Overall, 53 percent said they would be¹⁵. When all of the sexually exploited youth were given the opportunity to describe what types of services would be helpful, the most common responses included having a safe/secret location, a place to stay, someone to talk to, a place to shower and get cleaned up, help getting another type of job, and food (Table 7).

Key Informant Perspective

Key informants were asked to describe how/when they discover a client is involved in prostitution, how they formally assess the needs of the youth they work with, as well as what the most common needs and health problems are among this population. Eleven of the 15 respondents noted that their agency does formally document clients under the age of 18 who have engaged in prostitution or survival sex¹⁶. In terms of when they find out about this involvement, 9 of the 14 respondents said at intake or assessment, 3 during the crime investigation, and 2 at arrest or during a field interview. Closely related to this, when asked how this involvement was documented, seven said through intake interviews, assessments, or case notes; five said through arrest reports; and one said through medical/forensic records. However, only four said that they formally measure or assess need, either through a

¹⁵ These 31 youth who said they would be interested in stopping included 22 who were still involved, as well as 9 who had already stopped. The affirmative response rate for both groups was 53 percent.

¹⁶ Of the four who do not currently document involvement, two said they thought their agency would be interested in doing so, and two said they would not.

psychological evaluation (3), medical evaluation (1), interview (1), or educational assessment (1).

Table 7
SAFE LOCATION, BASIC NECESSITIES, AND
JOB ASSISTANCE AMONG MOST
FREQUENTLY DESIRED SERVICES BY
SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

Safe/secret location	70%
Place to sleep and stay	70%
Someone to talk to	70%
Place to shower	69%
Help getting another job	69%
Food	67%
Help with school	62%
Medical care	61%
Staff with similar histories	57%
Place to drop by during the day	57%
Dental care	52%
Help talking to family	48%
TOTAL	61

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

When asked to describe the top three needs of sexually exploited youth, key informants also put safe housing at the top of their list (Table 8), similar to the youth. Agreement was greatest in terms of the need to address the mental health issues of these youth, with more diverse opinions expressed regarding identifying other top needs.

Table 8
YOUTH SAFETY AND FULFILLING BASIC
NEEDS ALSO CITED AS TOP CONCERNS BY
KEY INFORMANTS

Safe housing	10
Mental health	9
Basic needs	5
Physical health	5
Prior sexual abuse	3
Substance abuse	3
Trauma	3
Pregnancy/parenting	2
Academic assistance	1
TOTAL	15

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

As Table 9 shows, when asked to describe the most common health problems of sexually exploited youth, contracting STDs was noted as a top issue by 13 of the 15 respondents, followed by being physically assaulted (9), being sexually assaulted (8), and substance abuse (6) (Table 8).

Table 9
STDs AND ASSAULT TOP HEALTH-RELATED
ISSUES OF SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH
ACCORDING TO KEY INFORMANTS

Contracting STDs	13
Physical assault	9
Sexual assault	8
Substance abuse	6
Health in general	2
Malnourishment	2
Pregnancy	2
Mental health	1
Sleep deprivation	1
TOTAL	15

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

When asked if the needs of males and females who have been sexually exploited differ, four key informants said they did, six said they did not, and five said they did not know. When asked how they differ, two individuals said the males are more independent (and do not have pimps) and two felt males are more difficult to work with, compared to females.

What services are available for sexually exploited youth?

As part of the key informant interview, respondents were asked to describe any training their staff received regarding the issue of prostituted teens, the level of expertise their staff has in terms of this issue, and what needs they are able to meet, either directly or through client referral. Of the 15 key informants interviewed, more than two-thirds (11) said that their agency had staff members with specific expertise about the issue of prostituted teens. However, only about half (8) said their agency

provided specific training on this issue. When the remaining seven individuals were asked why training was not provided, common responses included that the prostitution of teens was a relatively new issue for them to be dealing with (4), there was no one to be trained (1), or there were not enough resources (1). When asked if they thought any training was needed, five of the seven said yes. Also worth noting, when the eight who said training was provided were asked if additional training was needed, all but one said yes.

When the seven non-law enforcement key informants were asked if their agencies were able to currently meet ten identified needs of sexually exploited youth, it did not appear that they are currently able to meet some of the most important ones. As Table 10 shows, while five each reported they were able to address mental health and pregnancy/parenting issues, and four each offered services related to academic assistance, substance abuse, and trauma, only three were able to meet basic needs and only two provided safe housing. However, it is important to note that 9 of the 13 respondents said that their agency does refer these youth to other agencies for services, including housing/shelter (4), STD testing/counseling (3), mental health counseling (3), general counseling (3), legal assistance (2), follow-up testing (1), sexual assault advocacy (1), and other social services (1).

When the law enforcement key informants were asked if there were social service agencies they worked with when they encountered a sexually exploited youth, three of the four responded affirmatively. When asked how they found out about these agencies, their responses included word of mouth, from other officers, and from having held positions at other agencies.

Table 10
MOST NEEDED SERVICES DO NOT APPEAR
TO BE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO
SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

Mental health	5
Pregnancy/parenting	5
Academic assistance	4
Substance abuse	4
Trauma	4
Basic needs	3
Prior sexual abuse	3
Physical health	2
Safe housing	2
Legal assistance	0
TOTAL	7

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

What are the barriers to meeting the needs of sexually exploited youth?

Youth Perspective

Near the end of the survey, sexually exploited youth were asked if they currently wanted to get out of or stop prostitution or survival sex activities. Of the 60 youth who answered this question, 38 percent said yes, 30 percent said no, and 32 percent said they had already stopped. When 22 youth who were interested in stopping but were still engaged in prostitution were asked why they had not stopped, around half or more noted that they needed the money (64%) or they were afraid their parents would find out (45%) (Table 11). A little more than one-third (36%) also said they did not know where to get help and they had no where else to go. Others also said that no one had asked them before (18%) or that their pimp would hurt them if they tried to stop (14%).

Table 11
TWO IN THREE SEXUALLY EXPLOITED
YOUTH SAY THEY HAVE NOT STOPPED
BECAUSE THEY NEED THE MONEY

Need the money	64%
Afraid family will find out	45%
Do not know how to get help	36%
Have nowhere else to go	36%
No one has ever asked	18%
Pimp will be violent	14%
TOTAL	22

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

In a separate question, sexually exploited youth were asked if they had ever tried to stop in the past. Of the 62 respondents, half (52%) said that they had. When 16 youth who were still engaging in prostitution described what had precluded them from stopping, the most common responses included that they were not ready at the time to stop (10 respondents), there was no one or no program available to help (4), the program they went to had rules against alcohol and other drug use (3), the program had too many other rules (3), the program did not understand their needs (2), the program was too hard to get to (2), they did not feel safe (2), or they were afraid (2).

Key Informant Perspective

As part of the key informant interview, respondents were asked what challenges their agencies face when trying to address the needs of sexually exploited youth, which needs go unmet, and what obstacles the community faces in meeting these needs. In terms of what challenges their agency faces in trying to meet the needs of sexually exploited youth, responses from the key informants included that there are not enough (if any) effective local services for these youth (5), it is difficult to establish connections with some of the youth (4), there is not enough collaboration between agencies (2), and they need to do a better job of identifying the youth (1). One of the key informants expressed a frustration that was shared by many

who were interviewed regarding difficulties engaging some of the exploited youth, “There’s no trust. They do not trust anyone else, so why should they trust us? It takes a long time to build up the trust.” When law enforcement/prosecution respondents were asked a related closed-ended question, “What are the greatest challenges working with sexually exploited youth?”, four agreed with the statement that these youth are resistant to help, three that the youth lie about their age, two that there is no place to take them besides juvenile hall, and one that there is no place to refer the youth.

In another question that was posed to all of those interviewed, key informants were asked which needs of the population were going unmet because the community was not able to address them. Having a clear understanding of these unmet needs will help point to what additional services are needed for the region to effectively address this issue. Of the 15 respondents, 2 felt all of the needs were being met and 1 was not sure. As Table 12 shows, these 12 respondents were most likely to report the same unmet needs, consistent with other feedback from key informants and the youth themselves, including safe housing (11), basic needs (6), and mental health (6).

Table 12
SAFE HOUSING MOST COMMONLY
REPORTED AS AN UNMET NEED BY KEY
INFORMANTS

Safe housing	11
Basic needs	6
Mental health	6
Academic assistance	5
Legal assistance	5
Physical health	4
Substance abuse	4
Trauma	4
Parenting	3
Sexual abuse	3
TOTAL	12

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Youth Surveys, 2007

When key informants were asked to describe the greatest obstacles to the community in meeting the needs of sexually exploited youth, about half (8) of the 15 respondents agreed that lack of financial resources stood in the way, as did a lack of awareness of the problem. In addition, five felt the lack of gender-specific programs/facilities was an obstacle, two that there was a lack of political will to address the problem, and one that there was not enough collaboration between agencies.

FACTORS AND INTERVENTIONS TO BEST ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

What are the factors supporting prostitution activity in highly impacted communities?

Key Informant Perspective

The key informants were asked a number of open-ended questions designed to gain their input regarding the factors contributing to the prostitution of teens in the San Diego region. A variety of rich responses were provided, which can be summarized as including:

- failure of parents/guardians to adequately supervise children (6);
- child physical and sexual abuse (5);
- lack of coordination and denial of the problem (5);
- glamorization by the media (4);
- organization and involvement by gangs (4);
- expansion of the Internet (3);
- substance use by youth (3);
- pimps meeting the basic needs of the youth (3);
- characteristics of the San Diego region (e.g., size, proximity to the border) (2); and
- runaway youth (1).

Four of the law enforcement/prosecution informants also described obstacles they feel they or others in their organization face when enforcing prostitution laws. Their responses included that it is difficult to prove/prosecute these cases (2), there is a lack of placement options for the youth (1), and that it is not a priority for many (1).

Business Perspective

The businesses that were interviewed were also asked their perception regarding what factors contribute to prostitution activity in their community. Their open-ended responses fell into three categories: 1) the general characteristics of the community which are conducive to prostitution, including the number of motels, liquor stores, and crime in general (10); 2) the demand by individuals for this service in the area (9); and 3) the number of secluded or abandoned areas conducive to this type of activity (3).

What can community leaders, law enforcement, public officials, and judicial systems do to address the issue of sexually exploited youth?

As part of the key informant interview, respondents were asked to describe interventions or policies that are in place which are effective in addressing the needs of sexually exploited youth, as well as which ones are not currently in place, but should be. Their input was also sought regarding what their agency, policymakers/elected officials, or law enforcement and the justice system could do differently. In regard to what interventions are currently in place that effectively address the prostitution of teens, the most common response was “nothing”, a sentiment expressed by 8 of the 14 respondents. Others noted that while there are some interventions available, (including the SDYCS's Storefront Teen Shelter and East County Youth and Community Services, ACTION Network, Survivors of the Street, and the Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition), there is generally a “patchwork” of services, rather than a comprehensive continuum of services.

When asked what could be done to reduce or discourage the prostitution of teens, an array of ideas was shared that included:

- conducting more outreach and education with youth about this issue at earlier ages (9);
- utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach and meet the needs of families (6);
- changing the laws to include stricter sentences and provide more resources to law enforcement (5);
- providing outreach and education for parents and adults (4);
- engaging schools in efforts (3);
- supporting efforts to increase safety on the Internet (2); and
- conducting campaigns to unglamorize the behavior (2).

The respondents also provided a number of ideas regarding how their agency, elected officials, and law enforcement and the justice system could better address the issue, as shown in Table 13. These included making the issue a higher priority and providing better services to youth through different strategies.

Table 13
KEY INFORMANTS HAVE USEFUL
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS
ACROSS DIFFERENT SYSTEMS

<p style="text-align: center;">Their agency should...</p> <p>Lobby to change current laws (5) Provide more comprehensive services (4) Collaborate more with other agencies (3) Better document sexually exploited youth (2) Provide more staff training (2)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Elected officials should...</p> <p>Dedicate more resources to this issue (9) Make this issue a priority (6) Change current laws (5)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Law enforcement should...</p> <p>Treat sexually exploited youth as victims (8) Target johns and pimps (5) Dedicate more resources to the issue (4)</p>

SOURCE: SANDAG; ACTION Network Community Assessment Key Informant Interviews, 2007

Business Perspective

In a series of questions at the end of their interview, businesses were asked for their opinions regarding interventions and steps that are or could be taken to discourage or eliminate prostitution in the community. Overall, their responses suggested more positive views regarding what is currently in place to address the issue, but many still felt there were areas for improvement, including more action by law enforcement. In terms of actions that are currently being done, ten felt that efforts are being taken now and five felt that effective efforts are not in place. When the ten individuals were asked to describe what these successful efforts included, they noted surveillance cameras (7), more police (3), more attention to the issue from the community (1), efforts to close problem businesses (1), and prevention programs being offered for youth (1).

In terms of possible steps that could be taken, 13 of the businesses felt there was more that could be done. When asked what these efforts should include, the businesses gave a variety of responses that included having police more involved (4), providing more education/early interventions to youth (4), changing laws to increase the penalties for the offense (2), taking steps to encourage community members to work more closely with one another (1), engaging the military in the solution (1), and installing more cameras (1).

When asked specifically what the police could do differently to help address the problem, responses included having more patrols and visibility (7), acting as a resource and working with the prostituted youth to help them change their lives (2), collaborating with other law enforcement agencies (2), arresting the prostituted youth more frequently (1), and having more sting operations (1). Four individuals said there was nothing more law enforcement could do.

When asked specifically what the community could do differently, responses from the business representatives included working in a more

collaborative fashion (5), reporting more frequently to law enforcement (4), denying services to those involved in prostitution (2), and helping to develop social services/interventions for the youth (2).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2007, in partnership with the ACTION Network and with funding support from The California Endowment, the Criminal Justice Research Division of the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) completed a community assessment to help inform and guide plan development related to child and youth sexual exploitation in the San Diego region. As part of this assessment, data related to prostitution crime and arrests were mapped; surveys were conducted with 200 homeless, runaway, and other vulnerable youth; 15 interviews were conducted with key informants; and 15 interviews were conducted with local businesses. The goals of these efforts were to determine which communities are disproportionately impacted by human trafficking and child and youth sexual exploitation, identify a broad range of community partners, and determine opportunities to prevent youth from entering into prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation.

This CJ Research Bulletin describes the results of this information-gathering effort and summarizes the feedback provided through the interviews and survey as they pertain to the four primary goals of the project.

What is the scope of the problem?

According to those interviewed and surveyed for this project, the issue of child and youth sexual exploitation is a serious one for the region. While it is not new, it has appeared to have grown in recent years – a trend that could be related to greater involvement by gangs, a culture that supports this type of behavior, a growing number of teens who are seeking

positive reinforcement wherever they can find it, as well as the growth of the Internet and technology. According to the community, a by-product of the increase in the prostitution of teens has also been a rise in the number and types of problems reported by businesses, as well as violence and other types of victimization committed against the youth.

What are the needs of these youth?

Overall, it appears that many of the sexually exploited youth are from the San Diego region, although they have a history of running away from home and many have been homeless at least once in the past. Many of these youth also reported abuse at a prior placement that was related to their attempt to escape this situation. Those who exploit these youth do not discriminate by race or age, although they do appear to utilize enticements and psychological manipulation as part of their recruitment strategies. While many of these youth are still in school, they appear to have lengthy histories of drug use and to report other behavior, including risky sexual behaviors, which may put their physical health at risk in the future.

What are current service gaps?

According to the youth and key informants, the most needed services for this population relate to having a safe place to stay, basic necessities, and education/job assistance. However, despite the good intentions of many service providers and those involved in the justice system, it appears what is currently available forms more of a patchwork, rather than a comprehensive continuum of services. As such, it appears that there needs to be continued collaboration among stakeholders to identify and connect with youth who have already been exploited or are vulnerable of being so, removing barriers these youth may face in seeking or receiving services (including knowledge of resources and concerns of anonymity), and engaging youth who may have legitimate issues related to trust.

How can these gaps be addressed?

To effectively address an issue of this magnitude and complexity requires a multi-disciplinary effort that involves the commitment and resources from practitioners and policymakers alike. Based on feedback from those interviewed for this assessment, this would include engaging the community to report suspicious activities, implementing effective prevention efforts, developing comprehensive gender-specific programs that can meet the needs of these youth, and increasing and enforcing laws against those responsible for this exploitation.

Recommendations

Based on the information shared by the youth, key informants, and local businesses, the following recommendations are made:

- Consistent with other research, victimization and prior abuse were experiences shared by many of the sexually exploited youth. The relationship between these negative life experiences should not be ignored. Interventions need to address past traumas and current mental health and substance abuse issues.
- When creating interventions for sexually exploited youth, ensuring a safe environment should be paramount. This need was heard repeatedly from youth and it appears to be one of the largest service gaps in the San Diego region according to key informants.
- Even though the sexually exploited youth reported their health was above average, many had visited emergency rooms and reported behaviors that put them and others at risk in terms of public health. The medical community needs to be a key member of any coordinated effort to address this issue.

- From the input of both youth and the key informants, it is clear that a primary obstacle in helping sexually exploited youth is the sheer lack of services. Building the region's capacity to address the multiple needs of this population is an essential piece in helping youth escape sexual exploitation.
- Given the complexity and number of issues the youth are grappling with, any comprehensive solution needs to be multifaceted in its design. One approach to consider is the creation of a Multidisciplinary Team, comprised of professionals in the field who can provide a spectrum of perspectives to the problem.
- While vulnerable and sexually exploited youth differed in some ways, they also shared a number of similarities. Successful efforts to intervene early with this population must involve reaching out to runaway youth and taking advantage of other opportunities when they come into contact with the justice system or service providers to potentially change their life course and reduce the chance they will be sexually exploited.
- About half of the sexually exploited youth reported ever having been arrested by law enforcement. Any successful effort to address this issue must involve the gatekeepers to the justice system - law enforcement – as they can play a role in steering exploited youth toward needed services that may be available.
- Key informants and businesses were in agreement that any problem-solving effort requires a coordinated response, which includes law enforcement, the courts, service providers, as well as community members.
- Gaining the input and cooperation of local businesses in addressing this issue is

essential. Outreach efforts should educate businesses about the negative effects prostitution has on communities, the victimization and characteristics of the youth involved, and encourage them to report all related activities to the appropriate authorities.

- Key informants called for leaders in both the public and private arena to make eliminating this issue a priority. Means to accomplish this include becoming knowledgeable about the scope and dynamics of sexually exploited youth, the creation of policies that support enforcement of perpetrators, and the dedication of resources towards the problem to help build San Diego's capacity to assist these victims.
- This research has provided San Diego with a glimpse into the scope of this issue in the region. The need for creating systems to accurately gather data is necessary to not only document the problem, but also monitor any progress made from the implementation of prevention intervention efforts. In addition, research on this vulnerable population is scarce and further studies are encouraged to continue to understand both the needs of the youth and the communities affected by this problem.

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- San Diego County Probation Department (especially, Girls Rehabilitation Facility and Juvenile Services)
- San Diego Police Department
- San Diego Youth and Community Services (SDYCS)
- South Bay Community Services (SBCS)
- Stand Up for Kids, Oceanside and San Diego Centers
- YMCA OZ North County

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